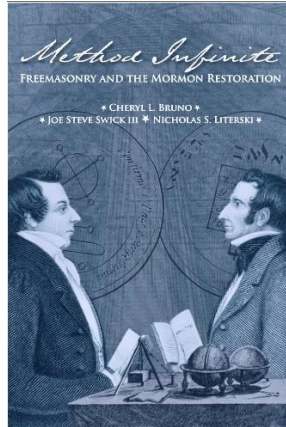


The Great Jewel of the Restoration

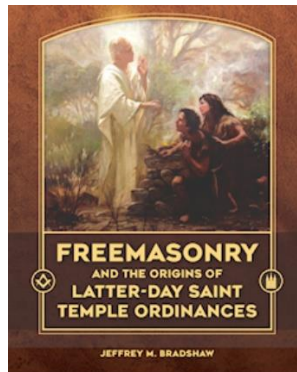
by Terry L. Hutchinson*

Books under discussion:

Cheryl L. Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, Nicholas S. Leterski, *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2022).



Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-Day Saint Temple Ordinances* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation & Eborn Books, 2022).



It has surely been said before, but the gospel may be considered as a cut jewel. The gem reflects light and color depending upon the angle of the viewer and the face of the jewel. As the angle changes, so does the visual perception and reflection from the stone. More than any other element of the restored gospel of

Jesus Christ, the temple and its ordinances are such a cut jewel. Hugh Nibley wrote “If I went to the temple five times and nothing happened, I would stop going. But I’ve gone hundreds of times, and the high hopes of new knowledge with which I go up the hill every week are never disappointed.”¹ Nibley’s biographer reported that “what Hugh has taken from his temple trips is more often an insight than a revolutionary discovery. ... [but] Much of what Hugh has learned through temple attendance is, however, quite profound. It is a direct result of the rich background he has as a student of ancient cultures and languages.”²

For decades, Nibley wrote articles and books about the temple and its relationship to ancient practices.³ Based on this, in 1985, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve requested “a report ‘on the history and significance of the endowment.’”⁴ A year and a half later, Nibley read a written report titled “Temple” to the Twelve and the First Presidency in the Salt Lake Temple and submitted a longer written report titled “Endowment History”. Both were subsequently published with some “explicit references to the Mormon temple endowment” deleted.⁵

In “Temple” (the oral presentation) Nibley touched on Freemasons, a modern group whose rituals have similarities with the temple endowment. In other writings, Nibley mentioned Masons, but did not provide a lengthy treatment of any parallels. In a 1980 letter, Nibley wrote, “The undoubted parallels between our temple ordinances and certain Masonic rites can be easily explained,’ he told an inquiring correspondent. ‘But ours makes a consistent theological and

historical whole and is much closer to some of the older rites than they are to Freemasonry.”⁶

Nibley wrote those words in 1980, but questions about parallels with Masonry and the endowment continue to be asked. Forty-two years later, we have two new books attempting to “explain” the similarity between Freemasonry and the Temple ordinances. These books come at the question from different angles. Each of them, therefore, reflects a different understanding of the endowment and its origins.

The first book is arriving in the hands of readers this week. It’s titled *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration*, co-written by Cheryl L. Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski. The book has been in preparation for more than twenty years. I, along with many others, have been looking forward to its publication. Now that its here, we can see what it is, and, more importantly, what it isn’t. For me, the benefit of the book is obvious, but I will note some areas of disagreement.

First and foremost, *Method Infinite* provides a thorough and engaging account of Freemasonry in the United States during the time of Joseph Smith. It provides a lot of interesting ideas about parallels between elements of Freemasonry and all kinds of events in the early years of the Restoration. An example of thoroughness is the photograph of the symbols in the foundations of the John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio (*Method Infinite*, 175). I found far too many interesting ideas in the book to list them all here, but an example was the authors report on the laying of the cornerstone of the Kirtland temple with an

apparent Masonic reference from Brigham Young “that followed the example set by Washington and his Masonic companions.” (*Method Infinite*, 181).

There were also claims that I felt were too tenuous. For example, the idea that “Master Mahan” from Moses 5:31, 51. In their analysis, the authors cite Hugh Nibley’s speculation “that the term means ‘great keeper of secrets,’ deriving from an Arabic word” and D. Michael Quinn’s theory that it’s “a Scottish name for Satan.” They then go on to say that “equally plausible as these two proposals is the idea that ‘Master Mahan’ is simply a variation of ‘Master Mason’” (*Method Infinite*, 133-134). Of course, each reader will compare the evidence and the ideas and come to their own conclusions, which may differ.

One thing I appreciated about the book was that it provides for revelation to Joseph Smith, as opposed to more naturalistic motives.

Parallels between Masonry and the endowment become problematic when contemporary Saints see them as opposing a belief that Joseph Smith received the temple ceremony by revelation from God. Likewise, accusations that Smith cobbled together ritual from items found in his environment miss his intentions as well as his genius in developing a meaningful religious ceremony for nineteenth-century seekers. The Mormon Prophet’s usage of Masonic ritual was informed and brilliant, and his positioning and development of elements of the different degrees can certainly be viewed as inspired (*Method Infinite*, 324).

Having noted the above, I have to say that one of my concerns about the book was its usage of work by scholars whose conclusions are not consistent with that statement. An example is their use of information from John C. Bennett. I was surprised when I first saw that. The authors try to justify and clarify their usage and their claim is plausible. I’ve read enough about Bennett, to be too suspicious of anything he says to buy it. They also occasionally rely on authors

whose belief is that Joseph Smith was a complete fraud. I would try to use different sources than Robert Hullinger⁷ and Dan Vogel⁸. I would rely on Richard Bushman⁹ or Ronald Barney¹⁰ for the purpose of describing Joseph's early life. For me, the choice of references is a fundamental aspect of a book like this and it also raises concerns in areas where I'm not as familiar.

Method Infinite is a starting point for several ideas about some of the grains that moved Joseph Smith to inquire and receive further revelation. We know that he did this with the priesthood as he and Oliver Cowdery translated the *Book of Mormon*.¹¹ Additionally, Bushman points out that

Joseph often requested revelation about things that caught his attention. His revision of the Bible had sparked questions that resulted in revelations such as the vision of three glories. Tensions in South Carolina brought on a revelation about coming civil war. He had a green thumb for growing ideas from tiny seeds. Masonic rites seem to have been one more provocation.¹²

I salute the research effort in *Method Infinite*. The references are many and varied. I especially appreciate having the footnotes on the page while I'm reading. I'm someone who reads the Bibliography and notes before I read the book, so this was a treat.

A second book on this topic will be out in the next week (I'm told August 3). Its written by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw (no stranger to this audience) and his new book is called *Freemasonry and the Origins of the Latter-Day Saint Temple Ordinances*, (hereafter *Freemasonry*). The book is an expansion of an article Jeff published with *Interpreter* in 2015.¹³ In the article (and now the book), Bradshaw traces the endowment and its ideas and practices back to antiquity. He disagrees with the statement that "the Masonic ritual source . . . cannot be reliably traced

beyond the early eighteenth century” (*Method Infinite*, 320). In Chapter 2 of his book, he makes his point, using authors cited in *Method Infinite*. However, this disagreement is collegial, and Bradshaw expresses appreciation for the authors of *Method Infinite*, who have generously shared a lot of their research and conclusions with him.

Bradshaw obviously shares the sentiment of former Assistant Church Historian Richard E. Turley, who recently said:

Over the years, many researchers have asked me about similarities between the endowment introduced by the Prophet Joseph Smith and Freemasonry, often pointing out similarities to me. I explain that Joseph adopted and adapted the then-popular pedagogical system of Freemasonry to teach eternal principles and that therefore they should look for the differences between the endowment and Masonic rituals if they want to find the essence of what the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith.¹⁴

In *Freemasonry*, there are a few brief chapters on the history of Freemasonry and its intersection in the early church. Like Richard Turley and Richard Bushman (and others), Bradshaw has acknowledged the influence of Masonry on Joseph’s revelations, but he demonstrates his approach to the ancient origins of the temple ordinances throughout the book. He identifies 31 separate parts of the ordinances and traces which of them come from one of four sources: Joseph Smith, Biblical sources, other ancient sources and Freemasonry. Bradshaw found Masonic rites as a potential catalyst for 12 of the 31 elements of the temple ordinances examined.

Chapters 7-16 of *Freemasonry* provides the analysis of Bradshaw’s approach, which is often contrasted with the work of others. As with Bradshaw’s other books, this one contains beautiful art (many in full color) to illustrate events along with helpful charts and graphs to help make the points. That’s particularly useful when

checking to see when the elements of the Temple or of Masonry were also found in the works of Joseph Smith, biblical sources, other ancient sources or Freemasonry. Eventually, the boxes with their checks are summarized. Here's an example from the final chapter:

8. General Comparisons to Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
A. Central Role of Jesus Christ	✓	✓	✓	✓
C. Ancient Beginnings	✓	✓	✓	✓
F. Exaltation for the Righteous	✓	✓	✓	✓

9. Comparisons to the Latter-day Saint Initiatory Ordinances				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
C. Clothing	✓	✓	✓	✓

10. Comparisons to Ritual Gestures and Language Patterns				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
A. Ritual Gestures	✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Ritual Language Patterns	✓	✓	✓	✓

12. Comparisons to Traversing the Veil in the Endowment				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
A. Sacred Embrace	✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Conversations in Most Holy Places	✓	✓	✓	✓

14. Comparisons to the Fulness of the Priesthood				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
A. Fulness of the Priesthood	✓	✓	✓	✓

15. Comparisons to Latter-day Saint Temple Architecture, Layout, and Furnishings				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
A. Overall Conception	✓	✓	✓	✓

16. Comparisons to Two Crowning Ornaments of the Nauvoo Temple				
	Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
A. Holiness to the Lord	✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Symbolism of the Angel Weathervane	✓	✓	✓	✓

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The logical comparison shown above is a strength of the book. Another strength is the explanation, along with references of the ties between a particular part of the ordinance, such as the initiatory rite, which breaks down into washing, anointing and clothing. Bradshaw shows biblical and non-biblical references to this practice. He then compares it with Masonry to see if Joseph hadn't included it.

Chapter 11 focuses on the endowment itself. In his review of 7 elements such as the Fall of Adam and Eve, three messengers, the True Order of Prayer and others, Bradshaw finds that all of them were revealed through Joseph Smith, all seven can be traced to biblical sources and other ancient sources, but none to Freemasonry.

Bradshaw does an excellent job of handling the sources and explaining them to the reader. His experience with ancient sources and their temple associations, which he's written about before is a strength, just as having Freemasons as two of the authors of *Method Infinite* is also a strength.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the grand jewel of the Restoration is the temple and its ordinances. The authors of *Method Infinite* and *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-Day Saint Temple Ordinances* each took a different approach in their study of the endowment. *Method Infinite* provides expanded information and possibilities to not just the temple, but to many other events in early LDS history. While doing this, the authors let the reader decide about Joseph's inspiration. The author of *Freemasonry* has taken a completely different approach. He focused on the parallels which exist between the ancient world and the current temple practices. Both approaches provide more understanding and appreciation for the temple. The reader can decide for themselves which approach is the most valuable. As for me, I prefer Bradshaw's approach. It explains more than a simple focus on Masonry, however detailed, can.

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¹ Hugh W. Nibley, *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), xxviii.

² Boyd Jay Peterson, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 357.

³ A sample of such works are found in Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, Ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987); Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, ed. Don E.

Norton (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992; Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment, Second Edition*, ed. John Gee and Michael D. Rhodes (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005). There are others scattered among the remaining 16 volumes of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley.

⁴ Peterson, "Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life," 355. [citation omitted]

⁵ *Ibid.*, 355-356. "'Temple' was published as "Return to the Temple," in Nibley, "Temple and Cosmos," 42-90, and 'Endowment History' was published as "On the Sacred and the Symbolic" in Donald W. Parry, Ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 535-621.

⁶ Peterson, "Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life," 357. [citation omitted]

⁷ Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2002).

⁸ Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2004).

⁹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2005).

¹⁰ Ronald O. Barney, *Joseph Smith: History, Methods and Memory* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2020).

¹¹ Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies Staff, "Oliver Cowdery and the Restoration of the Priesthood," in *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*, ed. John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2006), 145.

¹² Bushman, "Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling," 449.

¹³ Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 15 (2015), 159-237.

¹⁴ Introduction to virtual fireside on 17 October 2021, quoted in Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. The quote occurs more than once in Freemasonry, but one is found at the beginning of Chapter 7.